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Political Involvement and Noninvolvement of Social Work Practitioners

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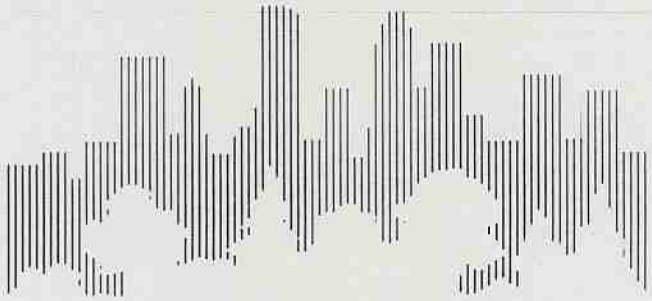

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MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK THESIS

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

To Angela Dawn Graham, you were my muse, partner and soul mate. I cherish the times we shared together. I long for you now that we are apart. Your love has captivated me, with feelings that remain always in my heart. Rest well, my Angie Dawn. I will love you forever and a day-
Thomas

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ABSTRACT

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT AND NONINVOLVEMENT OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTITIONERS

Thomas A. Skarohlid

This exploratory study interviewed 8 social work practitioners from a nonprobability convenience sample in the public and private sector, using a one-to-one semi-structured interview guide. Content analysis of interview transcripts identified major themes in the perceptions of social workers involvement or noninvolvement in political activity. Findings suggest that social work practitioners are involved in advocacy activity at both the micro and macro levels. There were differences in personal resources and interests of social work practitioners, that influenced political involvement or noninvolvement in both the public and private sector. The expansion of advocacy beyond casework to the broader aspects of macro policy practice and mobilization of practitioners with coalitions for collaboration of political activity in both the private and public sector was recommended. Implications for policy and practice are discussed.

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Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

The introduction chapter begins with a statement of the problem including a brief historical perspective of political involvement by social work practitioners, followed by a description of the purpose of the proposed research. The chapter next identifies the research questions and discusses the significance of the study.

Problem Statement

Most social workers know of the political involvement of early social work leaders such as Jane Addams, Mary Richmond and Florence Kelly. Throughout the 20th century the actions and writings of social workers included influencing social policy in every generation (Schneider &Netting, 1999). The role of settlement houses in the early 1900s provided a framework for gathering information, preparing legislation and organizing factions to influence social policy and legislation. During the 1920s through the 1930s, the social work field's preoccupation with professionalization and psychiatric casework seemed to diminish the importance of social work's obligation to influence changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions for the broader society. In the 1940s, Edvard Lindeman attempted to engage social workers in a debate over policies such as health care, racism, education and employment (Schneider & Netting, 1999). From the 1950s to the 1960s, social work leader such as Gordon Hamilton and Harry Specht, emphasized the unique responsibility and direct role that social work has in social policy formulation (see Hamilton, 1952; Specht, 1968). In the 1970s, Charles Levy recognized the complexity of influencing social policy but encouraged social workers to try to shape social policy through intensive efforts (Schneider & Netting, 1999). During the 1980s and 1990s, all social workers, including clinical practitioners, were encouraged

to include concepts that make policy practice an important part of their work (see Jansson, 1994; Schorr, 1985). Additionally, the Code of Ethics, the person-in-environment framework, and a variety of practice methods reflect the profession's commitment to social policy and political activity. However, Gibelman (1999) suggest that the field continues to struggle for its status and identity and that there is a historical division between macro and micro practice. The definition of the profession and its boundaries is a reflection of the values, priorities and technologies of American society in interaction with the social work profession. Gibelman (1999) further suggests that at various times in modern history, this societal context has served as a stimulus to expand professional boundaries. However, social workers have had to advocate for and create opportunities in spite of prevailing politics and ideology.

Ambramovitz (1998) suggest that social work's structural location and the process of professionalization undercut the profession's commitment to reform. Furthermore, the changing political climate also strongly affects its capacity to work for social change. In any given time the state of the economy, the nature of government intervention, and the strength of social movements shape the political climate. Additional influences include changing views about the cause of individual problems, the role of the market and the role of the state.

Purpose of the Proposed Research

Since the founding of social work as a profession in 1898, social workers have been encouraged continually to assume a key role in shaping social welfare policy (Domanski, 1998). Schneider & Netting (1999) suggest that the uniqueness of the social work profession calling disallow "one-dimensional or comfortable thinking" (p. 349). A

subsequent connection of individual efforts with the broader public actions of decision-makers in powerful positions may be the essence of social work.

There are few studies addressing qualitative inquiry of the activities of social work practitioners that may impact social policy. The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of social work practitioners and their involvement or noninvolvement in political activity.

Significance of the Study

The perceptions of those social work practitioners provide a framework to describe specific characteristics on a larger scale. This research study will also provide an important base of information or to what extent social workers address the broader issues and problems in society and actively assist in formulating solutions. Previous research was based on quantitative surveys. This qualitative, exploratory study examines services and policies related to social policy practice by social work practitioners.

Research Questions

This study will examine the perceptions of public and private social workers involovement or lack of involvement in political activity. Specifically then, this study will address: 1) Why are social work practitioners involved or noninvolved in political activity? 2) Is this involvement or non-involvement in political activity by social work practitioners different between the public and private arena?

Summary

This chapter has provided a background of the research questions examined in this study as well as the purpose and significance of the research. The next chapter, the literature review, will provide the history of the professionalization of social work

focusing on social activism and political activity of social work practitioners. The third chapter will describe the theoretical and conceptual framework upon which the study is based. The fourth chapter will outline the methodology of the study. Chapter five will present the findings and results of the study. The final chapter is a discussion of the findings and the strengths and limitations of the study, as well as the implications for practice, policy and research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The second chapter is a review of the literature. It begins with a history of the professionalization of social work. The two areas of social activism and political activity are identified as methods of political involvement and intervention of social work practitioners. The first section on social activism reviews three time frames: 1) The Progressive Era; 2) The Great Depression; and 3) 1940s-1960s. The second section on political activity first defines the concept of political activity in the field of social work, then reviews previous quantitative prototype designs and finally identifies gaps in the literature regarding qualitative methods of inquiry of political activity of social work practitioners.

History of the Professionalization of Social Work

Tracing back social work's history to the beginning of the 20th century, the emerging paradigm embraced both the individual and the environment. Social work was organized not only to help people to adjust to their existing situations, but also sought to work toward social reforms (Billips, 1984). What has been referred to as a simultaneous dual focus was perhaps never so widely practiced by social workers in the United States as it was a century ago. The professions dual focus of itself included, on one hand, social activism to change social policy and socioeconomic environments, and on the other hand, direct services and counseling to individuals and their families (Iatridis, 1995). Those who embraced social activism at the time were: included Jane Addams, Grace and Edith Abbott, Marion Hathway, Florence Kelly and participants in the Settlement house movement (Trattner, 1994). Jane Addams and Florence Kelly recognized that improving social conditions required challenging the existing power structure by forming coalitions,

molding public opinion, lobbying government officials, and actively participating in partisan politics (Weismiller & Rome, 1995). Social workers became particularly active in politics during the 1930s, largely as a result of the impact of the Great Depression. Since then, they have intensified their efforts to shape public policy and legislation through political action. (Weismiller & Rome, 1995). Reamer (1998) suggests that social worker's political activities have been more visible during some periods than others (most notable during the 1960s and early 1970s). However, the profession continues to strengthen its political involvement. For example, in 1972, NASW concluded that merely having a Washington office was not sufficient and moved from New York to Washington, D.C. (Reamer, 1998).

Those who supported direct services at the beginning of the 20th century included Mary Richmond, the Charity Organization Societies and the New York School of Philanthropy (i.e., the Graduate School of Social Work at Columbia University). They argued that direct work with individuals and the development of a scientific practicum was the primary focus of the profession (Trattner, 1994). By the 1920s, there was a growing tendency in social work to focus only on direct work. Indirect work did not take precedence for nearly 40 years. It has been argued that social work did not have its own theories of human development, personality, and psychiatry filled this void (Johnson, 1999; Specht & Courtney, 1994). Other arguments suggest that social work during this time focused on the individual and psychoanalytical phenomena in an attempt to increase the field's professional stature (Johnson, 1999).

Although this polarity of social work practice may seem to conflict, Iatridis (1995) suggests it reflects the profession's need for multiple approaches and methods,

including direct work with individuals and policy planning for social reform. Gibleman (1995) also suggests the influence of internal (profession specific) verses external (societal) influences which define social work. This definition may be characteristic to particular times, however this dynamic interaction provides the context in which the profession may be understood.

The profession's identity and status have been deliberated since the turn of the 20th century. As far back as 1915, Albert Flexner, raised the question whether social work was a profession. At the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, his report entitled "Is Social Work A Profession?"(1915) represented the first systematic and scholarly attempt to determine the professional status of social work. Flexner (1915) started with a listing of traits and attributes that presumably separated professions from nonprofessions. Popple summarized Flexner's list (1985, p. 561). Flexner (1915) suggested that professions distinguished themselves by the premise that they engage in intellectual operations involving individual responsibility, derive their material from science and learning, work this material up to a practical end, apply it using techniques that are educationally communicable, self-organized, and are motivated by altruism (Reeser & Epstein, 1990). Flexner (1915) next considered the extent to which social work possessed these traits. The "attribute approach," which is based upon what has been called the "trait model," of the professions, has been widely used by occupational sociologists studying established and would be professions (Popple, 1985). Flexner described social work as being scientific, scholarly and altruistic with a subsequent professional self-consciousness. However, he concluded that social work did not qualify as a profession because the field lacked autonomy and a theoretical knowledge base

(Flexner, 1915). Others have attempted to exclude social work from being categorized as a profession because of the broadness of the field lacks identity and that professions had to have definite and specific ends (see for example, Bar-On, 1994; Bisno, 1952; Eaton, 1958; Walz & Groze, 1991). Similarly, social work has also been described as a semi-profession (Carr-Saunders, 1965; Etzioni, 1969). Gibleman (1999) cites modern definitions of social work with a common focus on both the person and the environment (Barker, 1995; Crouch, 1979; NASW, 1996). The most recent definitions emphasize the commitment of the field to the vulnerable, poor and oppressed people (Gibelman, 1999). However, this professional concern appears conversely related to the growing number of social workers in private practice who predominantly work on a fee-for-service basis with a more affluent clientele (Gibelman & Schervish, 1997). The field of social work has long been concerned with the issue that increasing professionalization of social work as an institution and of social workers as individuals would decrease and possibly affect their historic commitment to social activism in behalf of the poor and oppressed (for example, Benthrup, 1964; Biseno, 1956; Hughes 1958; Reeser & Epstein, 1990).

Specht and Courtney (1994) suggest that social work has lost sight of the public social services and the public arena as a legitimate place for social work intervention. However, Haynes (1998) suggests that the commitment to the profession does not require deciding between the mutually exclusive paradigms of individual treatment and social reform. Rather, she suggests that to do social work and to be a social worker require commitment both to the goals of social justice as well as healing individual pain. Gibelman (1999), similarly, indicates that the prevailing political climate, whether

conservative or liberal, influences the perceptions and preferences of those entering the field of social work.

Current history has revealed that indirect work has received intermittent attention from researchers and practitioners (Johnson, 1999). Based upon the historical pattern that emerges, it appears that the focus and approach of professional social work should incorporate both direct work with the individual and also indirect work by influencing the environment.

The National Association of Social Workers

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest organization of professional social workers in the world. NASW serves nearly 150,000 social workers in 56 chapters throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, and abroad. NASW was formed in 1955 through a merger of seven predecessor social work organizations to carry out three responsibilities: 1) strengthen and unify the profession; 2) promote the development of social work practice; and 3) advance sound social policies. Advocacy, consumer protection, credentials, professional advancement and public awareness are the primary activities of NASW. In public policy advocacy, NASW staff and members participate in lobbying for the best possible social services legislation, improving human services programs, and supporting political candidates who support social policies consistent with social work values. NASW's consumer protection regulation protects the public and assures high quality social work services. Additionally, NASW sets practice standards, enforces a Code of Ethics, and works to improve state regulation of social work. NASW offers voluntary professional social work credentials and publishes a roster of clinical practitioners. NASW provides its members with

services: continuing education, conferences, workshops, professional journals and publications, and specialty practice sections to meet diverse member's interests. Membership services also include access to professional liability insurance, life, health and disability insurance. Furthermore, NASW conducts an annual public service campaign, launched during Social Work Month in March, to educate the public on pressing social issues (NASW Home Page, 1999). Ewalt (1994) reported that social work's participation reached a new milestone in the development of health care reform in 1992. NASW developed health care reform legislation that was introduced in the Senate, by Senator Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI), as the National Health care Act of 1992. NASW staff and members worked consistently to influence the outcome of the legislation. The social work profession contributed its knowledge to the formulation and to the debate about the kind of programs social work professionals believed would most benefit both client populations and the country as a whole.

Social Worker Activism

Social action as a method of intervention in social work developed in the United States during the 1960s, the War on Poverty (Resser & Epstein, 1990). The War on poverty was a unique opportunity to put social workers in direct contact with grassroots politics. The perception of society as an arena of conflict between "haves" and "have-nots" was the main focus of the new social action method of intervention (Resser & Epstein, 1990). As a grassroots method, social action is by definition communitarian (Figueira-McDonough, 1993). However, the subsequent objectives of social action differ from that of community development, which emphasizes social integration, self-help and participatory involvement. Instead the main objective of social action is redistribution of

resources and reduction of inequalities (Figueira-McDonough, 1993). Social work activism peaked during three historical periods at the turn of the 20th century, 1930s and 1960s.

Progressive Era

During the Progressive Era from 1896 to 1914, the initial struggle within social work took place around the issues of individual change and social change. The initial conflict between individual change and social change was exemplified between the social change-oriented Settlement House Movement and between the more individual oriented Charity Organization Society (Abramovitz, 1998; Axinn & Levin, 1997). Before the late 19th Century, the majority of social practice followed the mandates of the Charity Organization Society movement (COS). The COS presumed that personal failures and the receipt of public relief caused poverty and strived to make charitable contributions to the poor more efficient (Axinn & Levin, 1997). The COS, subsequently, introduced the principles of scientific charity with the main goal of the relief to poor people. The method was similar to the new scientific management theories followed by the industry of the time. It called for more efficient and rational giving by charities, investigation and moralistic self-help for individuals who were destitute, and abolition of public relief by cities (Abramovitz, 1998; Axinn & Levin, 1997). By 1892, the COS gradually gained control of the field of social work. Influenced primarily by the COS philosophy, the nation's major cities abolished home relief between 1870 and 1900. According to Abramovitz (1998), the conditions of poverty remained essentially untouched.

In the late 1880s, in reaction to the philosophy of organized charity, the Settlement House Movement (SHM) began. In contrast to the COS philosophy of

blaming the victim, the SHM argued that poverty was caused by adverse social conditions which individuals had little or no control over. The Settlement House Movement concentrated its services in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods. The SHM provided community services, advocated for unions and campaigned for relief of the social ills of the day (Abramovitz, 1998; Axinn & Levin, 1997). The SHM had a pronounced affect on many social workers that began to favor community service and social justice issues. The 1910 election of Jane Addams, as president of the COS, dominated the National Conference of Charities and Corrections and signaled that social work had begun to endorse social reform (Abramovitz, 1998). The SHM collaborated with various groups: feminists, businessmen, university professors and other reformers that began movements aimed at improving the quality of urban life on various levels. Through its activism, the SHM influenced social policy, including the passage of worker's compensation, mother's pensions and protective labor legislation.

A conservative period in the social work field silenced social activism that continued into the 1920s. However, the persistence of activist leaders, such as Julia Lathrop, a well-known Settlement House leader, continued to advocate for social justice issues. Although she failed to win support, she proposed major resolutions in 1923 to the National Conference on Social Work on peace, prohibition, child labor and minimum wages (Abramovitz, 1998).

The Great Depression

During the 1930s, the longest and most devastating depression in American history revived social reform activities nationwide. There were many factors that elicited a government response: an economic collapse, unemployment, the demands of militant

social movements and fears of more radical change. These conditions, and the inability of private social service agencies to respond adequately to the crisis, renewed the struggles within social work over individual treatment and social change to private charity and public relief (Trattner, 1994). The Great Depression had a profound effect on social work. After the Social Security Act of 1935 was passed, much of the financial assistance as well as much of the public health and child welfare services moved from the private to public sectors. Most social workers at the time believed that private welfare services was vastly superior to public welfare because public agencies were thought to be corrupt and inefficient During this time, the number of social workers increased from 40,000 to 80,000 and most of them worked in public agencies (Popple, 1995). The corresponding clientele of social agencies shifted from a number of non-poor individuals receiving psychotherapy to helping basically well adjusted people cope with problems brought about by unemployment (Trattner, 1994).

1940s-1960s

After World War II and up to 1960, there was a return to prosperity in the U.S. and a consequence was complacency of social activism and social services (Popple, 1995). Even though poverty still existed in the country, most people, including many social workers, believed that it was being dealt with by the public welfare system; and therefore, there was little cause for concern (Popple, 1995). The social work field again returned to concentrate on the individual causes of distress and on developing knowledge and interventions to deal with them. The subsequent testing of millions of military recruits during the war also personified this shift toward the individual focus and away from activism. The demand for mental health services resulted in the creation of the

National Mental Health Act of 1946 and the establishment of the National Mental Institute of Mental Health in 1949 (Popple, 1995). This focus on mental health provided social workers the opportunity to work in psychopathology and little attention was given to social activism. Throughout the 1950s, the general public believed that people were poor and oppressed either because they lived in areas isolated from general economic prosperity or because of individual problems that prevented them from functioning as viable wage earners (Trattner, 1994). During the 1960s the country was shocked by a series of books, articles and reports that poverty still existed in the country for reasons other than geographic location and individual short comings. Because of this and the general feeling in the nation that change was needed, an interest in the problem of poverty, public welfare and policy concerns dominated social work for the first time since the Great Depression (Popple, 1995).

In 1962, the Kennedy administration successfully proposed amendments to the Social Security Act, popularly known as the Social Service Amendments (Popple, 1995). The amendments main objectives focused on providing social services to welfare recipients to help them solve various problems that were inhibiting self-sufficiency. Although the amendments were successful in increasing the social work services in public welfare, these services did not have much of an ameliorative effect. Specifically, the amendments provided services to help individuals lift themselves out of poverty with minimal efforts directed toward altering the social conditions that caused the poverty (Danziger & Plotnick, 1986; Popple, 1995). However, the organization of the program was greatly influenced by the atmosphere created by the civil rights movement. In 1964, the Johnson administration introduced the Economic Opportunity Act. Alternatively,

different from its predecessor, the Act promoted empowerment of the individual. It emphasized community organization and social action that stressed involvement of the poor in making decisions about programs affecting their lives (Popple, 1995). Both local and indigenous participation was encouraged along with strategies of peaceful protest to promote social change. The Economic Opportunity Act established many new social service programs, including Volunteers in Service to America, the Job Corps, Upward Bound, the Neighborhood youth Corps, the Community Action programs, and Head Start (Popple, 1995).

The success of the civil rights movement in many American communities illustrates the use of these strategies (Trattner, 1994). Figueira-McDonough (1993) reported that the communities that were actively involved in the movement were carefully selected, prepared, and organized for collective action. The size and dramatic characteristics of the demonstrations were carefully designed to get media coverage. The visibility of the inequities suffered by minorities and transmitted through the media shocked many individuals and associations into supporting the demands of minorities. Through ensuring accountability in the area of social policy implementation and in guiding program reform, social action may be a unique type of intervention in helping deprived groups influence social policy (Figueira-McDonough, 1993).

Abramovitz (1998) suggests that social work's commitment to both individual and social change stems from at least three sources. These are the mandates of our professional organization, the professional literature and the long history of activism among social workers themselves.

Political Activity

Definition in the field of Social Work

Political activity is defined as the coordinated efforts of social work practitioners to influence legislation, election of candidates and social causes. These activities are: lobbying, testifying before legislative committees, monitoring the work of officeholders and government workers, advocacy activities, running for elective office, organizing or participating in political campaigns, fundraising and mobilizing voters, and public opinion (Barker, 1999).

Social workers such as Jane Addams and Lillian Wald worked to influence government at the local level and they regarded participation in government as part of the answer to solving individual problems (Weismiller & Rome, 1995). Social workers continue to be actively engaged in individuals and collective political action to improve social conditions. Haynes and Mickelson (1991) report that these occupations have included coalition organizer, professional lobbyist, policy analyst, campaign manager and elected official. These positions are now filled by professional social workers.

Quantitative Prototype Designs

The previous research related to the involvement or non-involvement in political activity by social work practitioners over the last 25 years has been documented through quantitative, qualitative research designs and motivational theories (see for example, Wolk, 1996; Gold 1990). The most recent studies of political activity uses cross-sectional, self-administered, quantitative research surveys, which allow for collection of large, detailed and systematic data needed for descriptive inference and prototype construction (Domanski, 1998; Salcido & Seck, 1992).

Salcido and Seck (1992) conducted a study to determine the extent of political participation among NASW members. Results indicated that Chapters were more likely to be very involved in traditional political activities such as contacting legislatures through telephone calls, letters and face-to-face lobbying. Additionally, the low level of participation in campaign work may suggest that few members of the NASW Chapters understand the long term importance of building political power and providing access to elected officials and party leaders. Furthermore, neither organizing coalitions of interest groups nor participating in protest rallies was selected with high frequency or identified as an area of influential impact. The authors suggest that the findings may mean that professional commitment to advocacy for disenfranchised groups is not a high priority. They recommend that more research is needed to understand non-involvement in these activities.

Many opportunities exist in the American political arena to utilize the resource redistribution and political interest of social workers involved in social policy practice (Domanski, 1998; Jansson, 1994). Domanski (1998) notes that when social workers neglect to engage in the politics of social welfare policy (i.e., acts aimed at influencing policy makers' resource distribution decisions), the needs of social work clients and the profession itself are left out of the policy development process. Domanski (1998) further identifies that to expand the profession's contribution to social welfare policy, social workers must become more familiar with and act on political actions that are already a part of their practice.

Domanski's (1998) study on prototypes of social work political participation found that social workers regularly advocate in the politics of power within agencies and

on behalf of their clients. However, efforts must be made to expand advocacy beyond casework to the broader aspects of macro policy practice.

Gaps in Literature

Many of the studies on political activity of social work practitioners were based on surveys, which are generally low in validity and reliability. Some of the response rates in these studies were 50% or less (see for example Domanski, 1998; Ezell, 1993; &Wolk, 1981). Furthermore, there were few studies addressing the professional commitment to political involvement or noninvolvement in advocacy activities by social work practitioners for disadvantaged or disenfranchised groups (see for example Domanski, 1998; Salcido & Seck, 1992).

In qualitative research, such as this study, researchers have varying attitudes about the definitions and criteria for validity and reliability (Rubin &Babbie, 1997). Since few studies have examined political activity by social workers using qualitative methods, this study will utilize a qualitative in-depth interview design to gather information on personal thoughts, feelings and perceptions of social work practitioners.

Summary

This chapter presented a review of the literature of the professionalization of the social work profession. The first section identified social activism historically in three times frames and the second section defined the concept of political activity in the field of social work. Finally, previous empirical studies were reviewed, identifying gaps in the literature. The theoretical and conceptual framework chapter is presented next.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICALFRAMEWORK

The third chapter reviews three theoretical frameworks: 1) systems theory; 2) radical social work theory; and 3) person-in-environment theory. The application of the person-in-environment and its impact on both the micro and macro level of social work practice are discussed.

Practitioners use theoretical frameworks to give meaning to and assess the strengths, weaknesses and resources in presenting situations and to understand people and their significant environments and systems (Turner, 1995). Because social work covers a broad spectrum of practice no one theoretical framework can cover everything. However, general systems, a scientific approach that regards phenomena holistically and ecology that examines the organism within its surrounding environment, have been embraced by many social workers (Payne, 1997). In 1937, Ludwig von Bertalanffy introduced general systems as a conceptual model that would organize diverse theories and facilitate communication and cooperation among practitioners of the applied sciences (Beckett & Johnson, 1995).

Systems

Systems framework may be helpful conceptually to understand how individuals are impacted by the various surrounding elements in their environment. General systems and ecology both stress the interconnectedness of social systems and seem conducive to both the environment and the social workers intervention on it. However, for examining indirect work, this perspective may have limitations. For example, systems conceptualization with similar conditions may reach different ends and conversely, systems with different initial conditions may result in similar final states. Consequently,

the practitioner is not given clear guidance on what course of indirect action to choose (Johnson, 1999). Also, general systems may not account for oppression of minority groups (Wakefield, 1996). For example, in the 1960s, there was an increasing recognition of the culture's effect upon social problems and people's response to existing services and opportunities for participation in the broader society (Jansson, 1994). People began to realize that the democratic society they believed in did not eliminate cultural oppression or discrimination as immigrants assimilated into the nation's dominant culture. Theorists began to discuss how social workers needed to consider the African-American, Latino, and Asian-American cultures to provide effective direct services and promote broader indirect services, such as political participation (Jansson, 1994).

Radical Social Work

Radical social work approaches have been applied to indirect social work (Epstein, 1995; as cited in Johnson, 1999). Radical social work is based on conflict, social exchange, feminist and Marxist theories (Payne, 1997). The strategies for effective redistribution of resources to the deprived community have both an external and internal focus. Internally Kahn (1954) suggests that community composition needs to be understood so that solidarity can be reinforced, its indigenous leaders supported and collective action orchestrated. External strategies have two major intents. First, to draw support from outside groups and from general public opinion. Second, to weaken the bargaining power of official decision-makers. To fulfill these purposes it is necessary to carefully map the positions of interest groups before coalition negotiation. Next, plan the presentation and coverage of the community problem so that there is maximum public support. Finally, study the political vulnerabilities of the authorities and the optimal

timing of public embarrassment to ensure success in public confrontation (Kahn, 1954). The main premise is that indirect work occurs on the political forefront. However, radical approaches to direct and indirect social work are less prominent today than were twenty years ago. Haynes and Mickelson (1997) suggest that advocating for others runs the risk of becoming apolitical and also may run the risk for providing less quality of service. Additionally, Domanski (1998) utilized a prototype framework to identify an understanding of the many roles that social workers play in the political arenas. This provides a framework for further in-depth study of political activity by social work practitioners.

The World View of Conservatives, Liberals, and Radicals

The competing perspectives between conservatives, liberals, and radicals have important implications for social welfare policy. Liberals and conservatives share a basic belief in maintaining our society as it is currently structured. Radicals have major reservations about the existing social arrangements. All three differ in important areas, including their views of human nature, individual behavior, the family, the social system, the government, the economic system, and basic values (Popple & Leighninger, 1996). Table 3.1 illustrates the comparison of conservative, liberal, and radical perspectives.

Person-in-Environment

Payne (1997) suggests that the person-in-environment perspective distinguishes social work from other helping professions. Person-in-environment is not a behavior theory-based diagnostic system producing a formal diagnosis, but rather a system for identifying, describing and classifying the common problems brought to the social worker (Payne, 1997). The "Working Statement on the Purpose of Social Work"

Table 3.1 : Comparison of Conservative, Liberal, and Radical Perspectives

Attitudes Toward	Conservative	Liberal	Radical
Change	Change is generally not desirable; it is better to keep things as they are.	Change is generally good; it brings progress. Moderate change is best.	Change is a good thing, especially if it means a fundamental change in the system.
Human Nature	People are essentially selfish; they need to be controlled.	People are basically good; they need structures to reinforce good impulses.	People are basically good; they can be corrupted by institutions.
Individual Behavior	Individuals have free will; they are responsible for their own lives and problems.	Individuals are not entirely autonomous or self-governing; environment plays a part in the problems faced.	Individual behavior is strongly influenced by social and economic structures.
Family	The traditional family is the basic unit of society; it should not face government interference.	The family is changing; it needs social and government supports.	The traditional family is oppressive; the changing family needs government supports.
Society	Society is inherently fair, it functions well on its own, and it is a system of interrelated parts.	Society needs regulation to ensure fair competition between various interests.	Society contains inequalities conflict between those with power and those without, and thus it needs change.
Roles of the Government and the Economic System	A free-market economy is the best way to ensure prosperity and fulfillment of individual needs; the government role is to support, not regulate, the market.	A free-market economy needs regulation by government to ensure fairness; government programs are necessary to help meet basic human needs.	A market economy is exploitative and inherently unfair; alternatives include mixed public/private economy, and socialist system.

Note. From "Social Work, Social Welfare, and American Society," by P. R. Popple and L. Leighninger 1996, p. 17. Copyright 1996 by Allyn & Bacon. Adapted with permission of the author.

(Minahan, 1981) developed a classification system using the person-in-environment construct: "The purpose of social work is to promote or restore a mutually beneficial interaction between individuals and society in order to improve the quality of life for everyone" (p. 6). In addition the statement identifies the following objectives:

> Social workers focus on person-and-environment in interaction. To carry out their purpose, they work with people to achieve the following objectives: 1) facilitate interaction between individuals and others in their environment; 2) help people enlarge their competence and increase their problem solving and coping abilities; and 3) influence social and environmental policy. (p.6)

Helping individuals, families, and communities improve their social functioning and prevent social problems from negatively affecting them requires that the social worker maintain a focus on how people interact with the relevant people and social systems in their lives. The social worker must simultaneously address both person and environment and the transactions between them (Sheafor, Horejsi &Horejsi, 1997). The person-in-environment construct uses the word person, not personality. Sheafor, Horejsi and Horejsi (1997) state that, "personality is but one component of the whole person. A focus only on personality would be incongruous with the domain of social work and slant it toward the domain of psychology" (p.7). Social workers must attend to the several interrelated dimensions of the person including both the immediate and more distant environments. An individual's immediate environment is the person's family, close friends, neighborhood, workplace, and the services and programs he or she uses. Teare and Sheafor (as cited in Sheafor, Horejsi & Horejsi, 1997) state, that social workers devote a major part of their attention to clients' efforts to improve interactions with their

immediate environment. Alternatively, social workers focus to a lesser extent on the broader environment possibly because the impact of problems in the more distant environment is less evident and more difficult to change. Because biological well-being is a prerequisite to positive social functioning, social workers must also be concerned with problems such as housing, health care and crime, etc. In addition, social workers should seek to change damaging societal values, correct human rights violations, and address unjust political and economic structures that may affect the near environment of their clients (Sheafor, Horejsi & Horejsi, 1997). Concerns over factors in both the immediate and distant environments is central to fulfilling social work's mission.

According to Sheafor, Horejsi and Horejsi (1997), one useful way of describing social work practice involves classifying the intervention by the size of the client system being addressed (i.e., micro or macro level practice). Social work practice at the micro level focuses on a person's most intimate interactions, such as exchanges between husband and wife, parent and child, close friends and family members. The activities such as interpersonal helping, direct practice, and clinical practice are often used interchangeably with micro level practice. At the other side of the continuum is macro level practice. Social workers engage in macro level practice activities such as administration, fund-raising, testifying on proposed legislation, policy analysis, class advocacy and social resource development (Sheafor, Horejsi & Horejsi, 1997).

Application of Person-in-Environment

Although general systems, the radical perspective, and prototype methods of social work may be applicable to indirect social work in some instances, this study instead will use the person-in-environment (PIE) perspective. PIE is selected because it

specifies social work as a profession based on the distinction of individual and environmental conditions or micro and macro levels of problems (Gibelman, 1999). Application of PIE to this research study with the dual-focus of both individual and the environment is descriptive of the micro and macro levels of practitioners as well as their types of political participation. According to Gibelman (1999), from its beginnings in the nineteenth century, social work has maintained a group of social workers with a dual-focus of concern between micro and macro levels of social problems and practice. One group has emphasized the personal needs of the individual and family. The other group has focused on social problems such as unemployment, health care and housing that are regarded as problems with the system. Johnson (1999) adds, "What might be special about social work is that practitioners have to have the ability to look to the person within the environment, but in addition 'act,' through indirect work on the environment" (p. 331). The person-in-environment perspective is an orientation among social workers and other professionals that view the client's problems and issues beyond the individual to the environmental system. Barker (1999) states: "this perspective encompasses the reciprocal relationships and other influences between an individual, the relevant others and the physical and social environment" (p.359). Therefore, the conceptual framework of PIE for micro and macro social work practitioners discerns between individual and environmental factors that influence involvement or noninvolvement in political activity, which is the basis of this study.

Summary

This chapter presented systems, radical social work, and person-in-environment perspectives. Application of the person-in-environment perspective and its impact on

both the micro and macro levels of social work practice were discussed. The next chapter will outline the research methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Chapter four begins with the research questions addressed in the study, followed by key concepts and operational definitions. Description of the research design, sample, study population, data collection, instrument development, data collection procedures, data analysis, measurement issues, and human subjects are also described. The chapter concludes with a summary of the methodology.

The research questions posed in this study are: 1) Why are social work practitioners involved or noninvolved in political activity?; 2) Is this involvement or non-involvement in political activity by social work practitioners different between the public and private arena?

Key Concepts and Operational Definitions

The key concepts in this study are the involvement in political activity by social work practitioners, professionalization, social action and social justice. The operational definitions of these key concepts are:

1) Political activity of social work practitioners is the coordinated efforts of social work practitioners to influence legislation, election of candidates and social causes. These activities are lobbying, testifying before legislative committees, monitoring the work of officeholders and government workers, advocacy activities, running for elective office, organizing or participating in political campaigns, fundraising and mobilizing voters, and public opinion (Barker, 1999).

2) Professionalization is the treatment of the individual clients and changing of social institutions, which is a characteristic of the simultaneous dual focus on person-environment interchange in the professional practice of social work (Billups, 1984).

Professionalization is based on the "capacity to presumably foster rather than inhibit social change" (Reeser & Epstein, 1990, p. 108).

3) Social action is the coordinated effort to achieve institutional change to meet a need, solve a social problem, correct an injustice, or enhance the quality of human life (Stuart, 1999).

4) Social justice is an ideal condition in which all members of a society have the same basic rights, protection, opportunities, obligations and social benefits (Stuart, 1999).

Research Design

This study is exploratory, utilizing a qualitative in-depth interview design. A semi-structured guide was used to interview social work practitioners face-to-face. The strengths of this type of design are the prolific amount of in-depth information that the researcher may obtain from participants, and the potential to probe for additional information in cases where the participant's responses to the questions are short or inadequate. A main weakness with this type of design is the social desirability bias of the subject's responses. Participants may attempt to provide responses that are socially desirable or they may be reluctant to disclose personal information because of embarrassment or guilt concerns. Additionally, generalization to the population is a weakness because of the small sample size.

The Sample

Study Population

This study focused on social work practitioners with at least eight to ten years of post-BSW or MSW degree experience, employed by either the public or private arena.

These social workers are NASW members and live in the Twin City area. The Twin City area is defined as Minneapolis/St. Paul and the surrounding suburbs.

Sample Criteria

The sample for this study was obtained by using a nonprobability convenience sample of social work practitioners from the NASW Twin City metropolitan membership list. One-hundred social workers were randomly selected. The Twin City area was defined as Minneapolis/St. Paul and the surrounding suburbs. If more than 5 reply forms from the private and public sector were to be returned, those forms would have been randomly assigned to the corresponding group. If less than 5 reply forms from the public and private sectors were returned, then these social work practitioners would have been matched to the appropriate sector.

Recruitment of Participants

The first mailing was sent to 100 NASW, Minnesota chapter members. The first mailing consisted of a letter and study information sheet briefly explaining the study and inviting respondents to reply on a self-addressed, stamped reply form if they were interested in more information. A follow-up reminder letter was then sent ten days later to all 100 potential respondents. Returned reply forms from potential participants was divided into the public and private sectors of employment. The first 5 reply forms from the private and 5 from the public sector were chosen for the study. Two participants from the public and private sector decided not to participate in the study resulting in a total of 8 who did participate.

Data Collection

Instrument Development

Information was obtained from the participants through a semi-structured, face-to-face interview conducted by this researcher. The semi-structured interview guide was followed for each interview with explanations and follow-up questions allowed for clarification and expansion of statements. This semi-structured, open-ended guide provided both a systematic and also a flexible approach for interviewing.

The interview guide was developed using a deductive approach from themes found in the literature ahead of time. The themes were placed into categories and then compared with participant responses. The open-ended questions were related directly to the research questions in order to illicit the personal thoughts, feelings and perceptions of social work practitioners and the factors that influence their involvement or non-involvement in political activity. Research Question 1 and 2 were operationalized utilizing the interview guide.

Additionally, demographic information was collected to describe the sample population. The interview guide was pretested with one person who met the same criteria as those in the sample. That is, the pretest case was a social worker with at least eight to ten years of post-BSW or MSW degree experience, employed by the public sector, a NASW non-member, and he practiced within the Twin City area.

Data Collection Procedures

The data was collected during face-to-face semi-structured, in-person interview. Each participant was interviewed once at a location of his or her choice, and each interview lasted from 45 minutes to 1-hour. Participants were offered a ten-dollar

honorarium for participating in this study. This primary researcher conducted all the interviews. With permission from the participants, all of the interviews were audiotaped. All audiotapes were transcribed and the tapes and transcripts were kept in a locked file cabinet.

Measurement Issues

Researchers have different attitudes about the definitions and criteria for validity and reliability regarding qualitative research (Rubin & Babbie, 1997). Because one of the purposes of qualitative research is to describe phenomena in-depth and detail with multiple perspectives, there is less of a tendency to be concerned whether one particular measure is really measuring what it is intended to measure (Rubin & Babbie, 1997).

A validity check incorporated into this study was the recruiting of two individuals familiar with the subjects of political activity, professionalization, social action and social justice. The two reviewers had experience with political involvement, social action, professionalization and social justice issues and at least eight to ten-year post-BSW or MSW degree experience, lived in the Twin City area, and were employed in the public or private sector. The two reviewers were asked to review the transcripts and the themes developed by the researcher to determine whether the researcher had appropriately interpreted the information and accurately ascribed themes to the participant's responses.

This study used only the researcher as the interviewer, and the same semi-structured interview guide for all interviews. The use of one interviewer and one interview guide provided consistency in the implementation of the instrument, which contributes to the reliability of the study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process of this study was a content analysis based on the interviews to identify themes and patterns, as well as descriptive statistics in terms of frequencies and percentages, to describe the sample population. "The analyst first pulls together all the data related to an issue (the research question), then subdivides that data into categories, patterns, and themes," (Patton, 1987, p. 149). By analyzing the data under each research question and identifying any themes or patterns, this study addressed its' intended exploratory inquiry related to the personal thoughts, feelings and perceptions of social work practitioners and the factors that influence involvement or noninvolvement in political activity. The data was categorized by each research question and then analyzed.

Human Subjects

An application was submitted to the Augsburg's Insititutional Review (IRB) board and approval was granted to conduct this study (IRB approval #99-70-3). All participants were ensured confidentiality, but not anonymity. This study followed the procedures and regulations outlined by the IRB board.The initial letter, as well as the follow-up letter, included a statement that their participation was completely voluntary and confidential, and that their decision to participate or not participate would have no effect on their relationship to NASW, NASW's staff or Augsburg College.

Once participants were identified by their initiation of contact with the researcher and expressed interest to participate in the study, informed consent was obtained through a signed written consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the participants rights and responsibilities and the voluntary nature of the study. Some interview questions could be personal and/or of a sensitive nature, and participants were informed that they

were free to refrain from answering questions that they were not comfortable in answering. Participants were also informed that if their participation caused them any anxiety and/or emotional distress that they were free to end their participation at any time, and that follow-up support would be made available from the Research Subjects' Advocate line in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Summary

In this chapter, the methodology was presented, including the research design. Results and discussion of this study will be followed in the next chapters.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of the study. It begins with demographic characteristics of participants followed by a description of how the research questions were answered through the study. Finally, common themes are identified in participant's responses to the research questions.

Profile of Participants

There were a total of 8 participants in this study. Six of the 8 participants were female and 2 of the participants were male (in which 1 of the 2 currently identified themselves as transgender). All of the participants were Caucasian. The age range of the participants was from 40 to 67 years (see Table 5.1), with the majority (n=5) between 50 to 60 years of age. Half of the participants were married (n=4) and 2 were single. Most of the participants (n=5) did not have dependents (see Table 5.1).

In terms of education, three-fourths of the participants had completed a Masters degree (see Table 5.1). By sample design, all participants had at least 8 to 10 year post-degree experience, resided in the Twin City area and were employed by the public or private arena.

Half of the participants were employed currently or in the past in the public arena and the other 50% were employed in the private arena (see Table 5.1). Fifty-percent of the participants were employed full-time. The length of social work experience ranged from 10 to 32 years, although 50% of the participants were employed between 20-30years (see Table 5.1). The participants' primary area of practice currently or in the past was in a mental or community mental health setting, followed by aging/gerontology. A demographic profile of NASW members worldwide is illustrated in Table 5.2

Table 5.1: Demographic Characteristics of Twin-City Participants (N=8)

		n	%*
Gender			
	Female	6	75
	Male	2	25
Race			
	Caucasian	8	100
Age Range			
	40-50 years	2	25
	50-60 years	5	62
	60+ years	1	13
Relationship Status:			
	Single	2	25
	Significant Other	1	13
	Married	4	50
	Divorced	1	13
Participants with Dependents			
	Yes	3	38
	No	5	62
Level of Education			
	Bachelors degree	1	13
	Masters degree	6	75
	Ph.D.	1	13

* Note: Percent may not add up to 100 due to rounding

Table 5.1 (continued): Demographic Characteristics of Twin-City Participants (N=8)

	n	%*
Employment Sector		
Public	4	50
Private	4	50
Employment Status		
Full-time	4	50
Part-time	3	38
Retired	1	13
Length of Social Work Experience		
10-20 years	2	25
21-30 years	4	50
30+	2	25
Area of Practice		
Mental or Communtiy Mental Health	3	38
Aging/Gerontology	2	25
Corrections/Criminal Justice	1	13
Community Planning	1	13
Administration	1	13
Direct Practitioners (Micro)	4	50
Indirect Practitioners (Macro)	4	50

* Note: Percent may not add up to 100 due to rounding

Table 5.2: Demographic Characteristics of NASW Members Worldwide (N=150,982)*1

		n	%
Gender			
	Female	119,840	79
	Male	31,142	21
Race			
	African American	6,443	6
	Asian	2,060	2
	Hispanic	3,129	3
	Mixed heritage	1,393	1
	Native American	624	<1
	Caucasian	99,502	88
	Other	71	<1
Total respondents		113,222	100
Age Range			
	Under 40	35655	31
	40-50 years	40,794	42
	50-60 years	22,987	22
	60+ years	5164	5
Total respondents		104,600	100

* Note: From "Who We Are," by M. Gibelman and P. H. Schervish 1997. Copyright 1997 by the NASW Press.

1 Note: Percent may not add up to 100 due to rounding

Table 5.2 (continued): Demographic Characteristics of NASW Members Worldwide (N=150,982)*1

	n	%
Level of Education		
Bachelors degree	14,151	9
Masters degree	117,668	77
Ph.D.	4922	3
Other	17,073	11
Employment Sector		
Public	29,421	33
Private	57,775	66
Total respondents	87,196	100
Employment Status		
Full-time	88,188	78
Part-time	25,164	22
Total respondents	113,352	100
Length of Social Work Experience		
Less than 10	42,378	49
11-20 years	29,543	34
21-25 years	8010	9
25+	6,201	7
Total respondents	86,132	100

* Note: From "Who We Are," by M. Gibelman and P. H. Schervish 1997. Copyright 1997 by the NASW Press.

1 Note: Percent may not add up to 100 due to rounding

Table 5.2 (continued): Demographic Characteristics of NASW Members Worldwide (N=150,982)*1

	n	%
Area of Practice		
Mental or Communtiy Mental Health	34,700	39
Aging/Gerontology	4,114	5
Corrections/Criminal Justice	1,073	1
Community Planning: (Data not available)		
Administration: (Data not available)		
Direct Practitioners (Micro): (Data not available)		
Indirect Practitioners (Macro): (Data not available)		
Other	49,545	55
Total respondents	89,432	100

* Note: From "Who We Are," by M. Gibelman and P. H. Schervish 1997. Copyright 1997 by the NASW Press.

1 Note: Percent may not add up to 100 due to rounding

Findings Related to Research Question One

To determine social work practitioners' involvement or noninvolvement in political activity, participants were asked to answer questions using the interview guide as described in chapter 4. To gain a better understanding of the participants direct perception of why they are involved or noninvolved currently or in the past in political activity, participants were asked to provide a personal definition of political activity and then were asked questions regarding factors that encourage or prevent political involvement and noninvolvement. Next, the presentation of study findings will discuss the research questions and the themes that emerged from each.

Research Question 1: Why are social work practitioners involved or noninvolved in political activity?

There were some common themes that surfaced from the interviews. Some of these themes were similar to the themes found in the literature review and emerged in this research. The themes are: 1) engagement in advocacy services for or on behalf of disadvantaged individuals, groups or organizations; 2) time and financial privilege; and 3) social work practitioners' personal interest and value system influencing political involvement or

noninvolvement.

Advocacy Services

All of the 8 participants in the study regarded advocacy services for or on behalf of disadvantaged clients, groups or organizations as one reason why they participated in political activity. Domanski (1998) states that advocacy activity by social work practitioners includes: "a person who engages in micro or macro advocacy on behalf of

clients"(p.163). Participants' commented on the personal and professional obligation of advocacy both at the micro and macro levels. The following examples illustrate this.

> I'm involved in political activity because I personally believe in the necessity of that...I look at the person and try to assess their strengths and what they need to do as a person. But they also are engaged with the system over here...so I intervene at both levels, you know the person-in-environment stuff (01).
>
> You can be politically involved on a client by client basis sometimes you do that. Such and such a client the county's threatened to take her children away and you go down and try to get the court to keep that from happening or the welfare department or whatever. Or you can take it as a broader issue that affects everyone and try to get rules changed. You can get laws changed to affect a much broader spectrum of the coin. So you can do it either way (02).
>
> I'm operating at the micro level. I'm not at the macro level. For example I got a dad who's talking to a lawyer about child support, so I'm right in the middle of that. I'm sitting there trying to help this dad trying to relate to the lawyer what's going on with him and what he needs. You know, that you got these lawyers who are representing the other person. It's "pay your bills or we're going to lock you up." It's like "wait a minute, I mean you know how is that helpful here?" So I kind of run interference for my clients. But I'm operating on a very personal micro level, which I think is important because that's where the rubber meets the road. So I work at the micro level for political change and I'm very effective because I coach people on how to work with the system (01).

Another participant stated,

> I would say that in working to influence legislation has been because of seeing clients that I was working with, were going to be affected negatively by current legislation or by opposed legislation and that would cause me to get busy (06).

Weismiller and Rome (1995) note that understanding how social workers can and do participate in the politics of social welfare policy is an integral part to advancing the profession's philosophy and goals. For example one participant described their advocacy efforts with disadvantaged individuals, groups, and organizations occurring at many different levels.

> I think advocacy has been a certain amount of my work too in that I will gladly enter into any system and wrestle with people in it, up to the top, in order to get services for people or a clearer understanding of professional roles and making sure that nobody is disrespecting social workers, therapists, progressive social improvements, that kind of thing (04).

As one participant expressed, their advocacy efforts had a positive impact for various disadvantaged groups.

> I'm tied into some other networks...MAP (i.e., Minnesota AIDS Project) and Out Front Minnesota...so all the other groups that I have some, well there's all kinds of them...and so I can take some advocacy action and know what legislator would have influence at this or that time and make a timely call or whatever. That makes a difference (04).

Time and Financial Privilege

The participants' time and financial considerations were another factor that influenced political involvement and noninvolvement. Domanski (1998) indicates that, as political activity requires greater resource expenditure, the volume of respondent participation decrease. All eight participants identified both time and financial resources as critical factors in why they were involved or noninvolved in political activity currently or in the past. One participant commented: "I suppose I've had the luxury of having only one job so I've had the free time to do that." Another participant stated: "I think it's time more than anything else. There are great other pressures on time and I have many different hats that I wear in my life and some require a great deal of time." One participant described their position of privilege as having both a positive and negative affect on their political involvement.

> Privilege helps. The fact that I'm a white, educated professional person, it gives me more access...a lot of clients who are people of color and poor and not traditionally educated and not seen as credible, don't have that impact. They call up their legislator or whatever, if they can figure out how, if somebody points it out to them, and probably not get the same response...which is kind of aggravating. Sometimes I think I ought to be more active in party politics and so forth but the amount of time that it takes is tremendous. Sometimes I'm ashamed that I wasn't more political, but I didn't have the skids greased in some ways that some people did. Well running for elective office for instance, I've thought about it, but I just don't have the backing to do it. My minority status has made it difficult to do because I'm bisexual and transgender and I'm very open about it. It

> seems people who are most effective are the people who have been more privileged than me. Many of them don't even have to work for a living...so while some people in college had the time to go out and take part in a lot more demonstrations and a lot more lobbying efforts, I didn't...other people who had no job and income from their families or didn't have the kind of work where that would be an issue they could do it...so there's a funny privilege difference (04).

A similar comment regarding privilege affecting political involvement was made by another participant: "Position of privilege has helped me to be more politically effective. I wish it weren't so, but I'm afraid it is. I don't hesitate to use it."

Personal Interest and Value System

Seven of the eight participants commented that their personal interest and value system influencing their political involvement or noninvolvement. One person stated, "Whenever I interact with anybody there's a political thing going on because I have my values." The same participant reflected on their previous life experience shaping their personal interest and value system and how it has impacted their political involvement and noninvolvement.

> I'm a little jaded toward politics to be honest. I'm a 60s kid and I'm proud of it. I did some demonstrating and marching, not in a huge way but you know, got drafted during the Vietnam War, been through all the stuff...been through some shit to get where I am. It was miserable in the 60s in terms of the draft, you know, in terms of a young man because we were all vulnerable and I was too. So I did some political stuff, wrote a newsletter for an organization that was trying to push civil rights, stuff like that. So I've done some of that in my younger days. I'm

> kind of one of those Americans that still votes-I haven't given up on that, but it's corrupt and as we were talking about this campaign finance reform money (01). Politicians are for hire and they get bought out…so I'm a very discouraged by how money influences choice.

Two other participants commented in retrospect, how their personal interest and value system influenced their political activity over time.

> Going through a time when maybe I was very politically active as a student, as an undergraduate, maybe as a graduate student…and caring a lot…to feeling like it didn't matter whether I was politically active or not because the system was too big, too uncaring, too unfeeling…and putting my time in wasn't going to make a difference (07).

> When I was in high school to have hair as long as yours could be dangerous. And I had hair down to my shoulders at on point. My senior year in high school I let my hair grow a lot longer and I was in danger from that and I helped participate in the first sit-down strike in a California high school, I helped organize it. I was vice-president of the student council and we organized a sit-down strike where all of us, the whole school body sat down in the central plaza of the school and wouldn't move…they stopped hassling me and others about our hair (04).

Additional comments on how personal interest and values affect different activities of political involvement were made. The individual attitudes express involvement in issues of personal interest and frustration with administration and the bureaucratic process.

I would say my personal belief and values influence who I vote for. In terms of getting involved with committees and influencing stuff, I sign a petition if it comes around, but I'm not out there. I just feel that it's fine and I respect people that do it. I just don't choose to put my time there (01).

I just hate doing telephone banking. And what prevents me from doing it? I detest it. Yeah, I'm not interested. And I guess I'm as good as the next person at doing it. I just don't happen to want to do it. Let somebody else do it. Sometimes when people call me soliciting, sometimes, depending on what the situation is, I'll thank them for doing a dreadful job (05).

Sometimes I'm kind of turned off toward bureaucracies and I think NASW in some ways is kind of a big bureaucracy in a way. I'm not turned on to administration. I'm a clinical person. It seems like I'm always fighting with administration for more resources or more understanding and not always that bottom line mentality, you know...I'm a little pissed off too about the way things go, yeah (01).

I pursue issues that move my soul, not necessarily issues that are unique to social work. I won't be at social work day at the Capitol. The only reason I would go to the Capitol would be a specific issue that grabbed me and that I cared about, then I would be there. But those have not been the issues that I have seen NASW working on. There have been issues that other people are working on and so I get involved in those causes. I was at hearing this morning...last night I was making phone calls to legislators...but those are issues I care about and those don't

happen to mesh exactly with NASW issues. So I'm glad that the NASW people are out there doing their things. This is a good thing, not my thing (05).

Findings Related to Research Question Two

This research question attempts to find out if there is a difference between political involvement and noninvolvement of social work practitioners employed by the public or private arena. Participants were asked to provide a response to a standard definition provided by the interviewer and if they were involved or noninvolved in these activities. Other questions were asked regarding NASW and social policy issues, running for public office, and the concerns and issues that practitioners would like public officials to know about the profession and its clients. The type of political participation by social work practitioners employed by the public and private arena are illustrated in Table 5.3.

Research Question 2: Is this involvement or noninvolvement in political activity by social work practitioners different between the public and private arena?

Four of the ten types of political activity that were different between the public and private arenas by Barker (1999) were: 1) influence of legislation, 2) election of candidates and social causes 3) running for elective office and 4) the influence of public opinion. The remaining six activities that participants were involved or noninvolved in were exactly the same for both public and private arenas (see Table 5.3). Practitioners in the public arena who were lobbying and testifying may have also influenced legislation, although they did not recognize this.

Political Involvement Differences

The differences in political involvement between social work practitioners employed by the public and private arena may correspond with previous studies

Table 5.3: Type of Activity Defined by Barker (1999) by level of Political Participation in Public and Private Arena (N=8)

	Political Involvement	
	Public Arena	Private Arena
Type of Activity	n	n
Influence legislation	0	3
Election of candidates and social causes	0	3
Lobbying	2	2
Testifying	2	2
Monitoring the work of officeholders and government workers	4	4
Advocacy activities	4	4
Running for elective office	0	2
Campaign participation	3	3
Fundraising and voter mobilization	2	2
Influence public opinion	2	3

demonstrating lower levels of participation in activities that entail the greatest initiative, the potential for conflict, or fewer opportunities to become involved (see for example Gormley, 1986; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Olsen, 1982). One participant commented on their personal fear of being identified.

> I've thought about do I want to have a bumper sticker that says I'm pro-choice sitting in a parking lot at work? Some of that is my own personal fear. And some of that is just should I be doing that working for an organization? Some of it's irrational because they're not going to know whether it's my car or not. But if I see a client and they look at the bumper sticker on my car, is that a transfer sort of issue? So I probably am much less vocal now than I used to be when I was more anonymous (03).

A participant that was employed in the public arena stated, "Now running for political office stuff might interfere with my current job because I work for a county government." Two participants commented on their lack of opportunity to become involved in political activities because of constraints imposed by their agencies: "Well part of it is the sanction by my employer, so there's permission from the administration or the directors to be doing that." The other stated: "To fight with my agency to get a chance to go. Agencies don't, I mean the agency has their hired lobbyists to do that stuff."

One individual commented on their personal initiative to be involved in political activity.

> Well I've always had jobs that have let me define my own work. As an administrator it's a lot easier for you to say, "I'm leaving today and I'm going to

> be over at the capital." The other piece of it is that in some cases I've sought out jobs that require that I do that kind of work (02).

Political Involvement Similarities

Six of the 10 types of political activity were exactly the same between the public and private arenas. All of the respondents participated in monitoring the work of officeholders and government workers and advocacy activities (see Table 5.3). Advocacy, on behalf of an individual or a community, is at the very core of the social work profession (Mickelson, 1995). The NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 1996) states that advocacy is a basic obligation of every professional social worker. In standard 6.04(a), the Code mandates that:

> Social workers should engage in social and political action that sees to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services and opportunities that require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully. Social workers should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice. (p. 27)

Furthermore, the Code is intended as a guide to the everyday professional conduct of social workers. The excerpts from the Code assist social workers in viewing the policy and legislative arena as part of their identity and obligations as social workers at both the micro and macro level (Schneider & Netting, 1999).

Summary

The 8 social work practitioners that participated in this study were all involved in political activity currently or in the past. The reason why they were involved or noninvolved in activities was due to obligations to provide advocacy services for or on behalf of disadvantaged individuals, groups or organizations, time and financial resources that were available currently or in the past, and their personal interest and values concerning the profession and its clients.

Social work practitioners employed in the public and private arena included both differences and similarities in the type of political involvement. The differences were: 1) influence of legislation; 2) election of candidates and social causes; 3) running for elective office; and 4) the influence of public opinion. The similarities included: 1) lobbying; 2) testifying; 3) monitoring the work of officeholders and government workers; 4) advocacy activities; 5) campaign participation; and 6) fundraising and voter mobilization. The final chapter is a discussion of the findings and the strengths and limitations of the study, as well as the implications for practice, policy and research.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with a discussion of the major findings of the study followed by the strengths and limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with implications and recommendations for practice, policy and research.

Discussion

The findings in this study correspond with themes found in the literature. Common themes found in both the literature and the interviews include advocacy activities at both the micro and macro-level, differences in personal resources and interests of social work practitioners' that influenced political involvement or noninvolvement.

In this study, political activity by social work practitioners seems to have an impact at both the micro and macro level. Effective interaction between social workers that work on micro and macro levels has not always occurred. According to Specht and Courtney (1994), all social workers require a combination of both micro and macro skills to help individuals and groups build a community-based system of social care that leads to healthy communities. Furthermore, they suggest that when combined efforts of both micro and macro practitioners focus on the needs of clients, social justice for all will be achieved.

Additionally, this study points out potential differences between the political involvement of social work practitioners in the public and private arenas. Contributing factors that may encourage or prevent political activity between these two groups appears to be related to participation in activities that entail the greatest initiative, potential for conflict, or fewer opportunities to become politically involved.

Advocacy Services

The 8 social work practitioners that participated in this study were all involved in advocacy activities at the micro and/or macro levels. Many argue that social work's stated focus is person-in-environment (see for example Johnson, 1999; Payne, 1997; Schneider & Netting, 1999). The person-in-environment construct directs the practitioner to take into account the individual client and the client's situation. The majority of the participants in this study indicated their professional obligation to advocate on behalf of disadvantaged individuals, groups and/or organizations. Social work's dual focus on both the individual and the environment has been underdeveloped by the profession (Billips, 1984; Gibelman, 1999). Dealing with these discrepancies between the needs of people and the provision of resources is the specialty of social work (Iatridis, 1995). Results of this study appear to coincide with this conflict between micro and macro level practitioners. Schneider and Netting (1999) note that the profession of social work must move from seeing micro-level activities such as clinical social work as separate from policy or macro-level practice and vice versa to an integrated relationship. There may be many good reasons to pursue this endeavor. First, direct micro level workers have first hand knowledge of how policies affect individuals. They experience the direct and immediate effect of a given policy on the individual with whom they are working. This subsequent knowledge is vital to the development of new proposals and policies that micro level practitioners can contribute to policymakers or advocacy groups. Additionally, both local and agencies abroad are interested in finding cost-effective solutions to social problems (Zimmerman, 1995). According to Schneider and Netting (1999), professional service providers know that most problems are complex, immune to

easy solutions, and require multiple insights. The social work profession has within itself the basic core concept of "person-in-environment" (p.353) that illustrates a comprehensive approach to problem solving. If both the micro and macro social worker collaborate, the chance of realistic solutions to problems rising to the surface in the form of social policy will increase. Furthermore, if both micro level and macro level practitioners recognize the value of the other and contribute to each other's goals, a stronger, more effective social work profession will emerge (Schneider & Netting, 1999). The combined advocacy at both the micro and macro level expands credibility and the impact that social work has on improving the design, delivery, and outcomes of social work (Jansson, 1994; Johnson, 1998). Advocacy can be divided into two general areas: case (micro) and class (macro) advocacy. Case advocacy refers to working with the client's interaction with the environment. Class advocacy refers to intervention to change the environment through social policy. A person-in-environment perspective provides many points of intervention and different forms of advocacy (Mickelson, 1995). Although advocacy is a fundamental component of the profession, it is generally viewed as an element of macro practice, because it is more concentrated and viable in macro level practice areas (Mickelson, 1995). However, caseworkers or micropractitioners undertake advocacy efforts. Such actions are often referred to by other titles. For example, in a case management setting the practitioner may request certain services that are out of the ordinary be provided if the client request them. In other settings, advocacy may be the primary function of practitioners employed as community organizers, political aides, lobbyists, administrators, or elected officials, whose job is to bring about social change. Mickelson (1995), adds, "because social workers practice in numerous settings

and with various types of clients, they must use different approaches to champion their clients' rights" (p. 96). Furthermore, to ensure effective outcomes, social workers must possess various advocacy skills and strategies, combined with a thorough understanding of the client's circumstances. "The cardinal rule of social work is to start where the client is, and the same principal applies to advocacy" (Mickelson, 1995, p. 96).

Stuart (1999) states that social work's distinctive contribution to American life has been its ability to link client systems-individuals, families, groups, and communities to social welfare policy. This unique focus has characterized the profession since its origins in the 19th century. Both settlement houses and charity organization societies emphasized the relations of clients with larger systems in their social environments. However, widely divergent and often divisive views prevail concerning the part social work plays in helping people and society to raise life to its highest value (see for example Billips, 1984; Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Gibelman, 1999; Johnson, 1999; Specht & Courtney, 1994). The findings of this study suggest that there is not a common mission between micro and macro level practitioners that they can both agree upon. Contrary to this study, micro level practitioner's focus on specific interest of their practice or clients while macro level practitioners, including those in organizations such as NASW, are involved with broader social policy issues such as welfare reform, managed care and licensing issues, to name a few. The interrelatedness between micro and macro practice is critical for both arenas if the profession is to work effectively for its clients and society. Mickelson (1995) points out that the class advocate cannot bring about change without needed data from case advocates who have a clear understanding of the effect of social policy on individual clients.

Time and Financial Resources

Changing social policy is a time consuming and slow process. The micro social worker does not always have the time to address policy change and therefore must rely on the macro practitioner to work for social justice (Mickelson, 1995). Efforts to work for social justice and social reform require involvement in the political process. Interestingly in this study some participants were attracted to and fascinated by politics while others found activities such as running for elective office as distasteful. According to Sheafor, Horejsi and Horejsi (1997), "How and to what degree one involves himself or herself in political activity is, or course, a matter of choice and a reflection of such factors as interest, available time, energy level, and personal style" (p.23). Results of this study coincide with the literature that many social workers are in a position to identify responsible leaders and support their election or to seek political office themselves. Additionally, the participants were also able to observe the direct impact that social policies and programs had on the lives of their clients and on issues reflective of their personal interests. Sheafor, Horejsi and Horejsi (1997) note that these direct observations are rarely available to the politicians who consider legislation and administrators who develop policy and design programs. The social work practitioners in this study seemed to have varying levels of personal resources, interests and position of privilege to be involved politically. Furthermore, throughout the interviews, participants examined their beliefs and values and made decisions about where they stood on complex issues on both the micro and macro level of political involvement.

Differences Between Public and Private Arenas

A major arena for political involvement is in the nonprofit sector (Weil, 1997). In this study, the 4 participants employed in the private arena were involved in political activities whereas the other participants employed in the public arena were less involved. In order to correct an injustice, people must become politically involved, speak out and propose practical solutions (Code of Ethics, 1996). However, Sheafor, Horejsi and Horejsi (1997) point out that those who seek social reform must understand that they will often pay a price for challenging powerful individuals, organizations or interest groups who stand to lose money, power, or position if the status quo is altered. Interestingly, the participants in this study that did not engage in activities that their compatriots did appear to have concerns about public ridicule, potential job loss and other personal risks that prevented them from political involvement. Collaboration of service coordination and political involvement between the private and public arena may increase in the future. Weil (1997) states:

> As the federal government turns social program decision making over to state and local governments, many public sector social workers will find their jobs reorganized to focus on monitoring external contracts, and public sector social work planners and managers will likely be increasingly involved in community work and interorganizational work to strengthen collaboration among the public and private sector (p.52).

Furthermore, it appears that practitioners will need to learn to use information between the public and private arenas more effectively to educate the public and elected officials about the realities of issues that their clients and agencies face.

Strengths and Limitations

The primary strengths of this study are the richness of the in-depth perspectives and perceptions of social work practitioners that the qualitative method provided. Information this rich and descriptive would not be attainable in a study using quantitative methods. One of the purposes of qualitative research is to describe phenomena in depth and in detail with multiple perspectives (Rubin & Babbie, 1997).

The limitations of the study are primarily related to the small sample size, non-randomization, and the inability to use probability theory like a quantitative method may. The situations, perceptions and experiences of those who volunteered to participate in this study may not be reflective of those who chose not to participate in the study, or of those who live in places other than the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Respondents were primarily female, creating a need to examine gender differences with caution. However, the occupation of social work continues to be primarily female.

Implications for Social Work Practice and Policy

Edwards (1995) notes that there are increased numbers of social workers in high-level management positions throughout the public and private sectors. There has been a tremendous growth in purchase of service arrangements, where public agencies contract with private agencies to provide mandated services such as foster, mental health, long-term and nursing care provisions. Given the expected changes in social services policy, it will be increasingly important for social workers to be engaged in local and economic development projects and to incorporate sustainable development concepts into practice. This may suggest that advocacy beyond casework to the broader aspects of macro policy practice and the mobilization of practitioners with coalitions for collaboration of political

activity in both the private and public sector is warranted (see for example, Domanski, 1998). According to the participants of this study, political involvement can be tiring and frustrating. Some social workers begin to lose heart and give up the fight when confronted with frequent setbacks and resistance. Sheafor, Horejsi and Horejsi (1997) add that in order to continue working for desirable social and community change, year after year, social workers must strive to develop personal qualities of hopefulness, patience, perseverance, and tolerance.

The findings of this study coincide with what Weismiller and Rome (1995) alluded to:

> From the beginning, the experience of some social workers taught them that government action was often needed to protect and enhance the lives of people. They recognized the need to change public policies and private service delivery to meet the needs of the individuals and groups they served. Because individuals are affected by the environment in which they live, a need exists to examine social and behavioral factors in achieving change. (p. 2305)

Politically, most social workers tend to be on the liberal side of the conservative to liberal continuum. Figueira-McDonough (1993) states that, "It would appear that social workers, by virtue of their roles and commitments, are particularly well-placed to act as the social conscience of liberal democracies" (p. 180).

Implications for Research

This study is reflective only to the experiences and perspectives of the 8 social work practitioners who participated in the study. The participants in this study could be described as rich in knowledge and insight based upon their extensive experience in the

field of social work. There seems to be a need to obtain knowledge and input from young adults in the field of social work and from education professionals who train them. Programs to develop skill building and knowledge about legislative processes, political strategies and social policies seem to be a high priority of future research (see for example Schneider & Netting, 1999).

Mickelson (1995) notes that unquestionably the social work profession will succeed in the interpersonal aspects of political activity. However, to really compete, the practitioner must use present technology. With the establishment of NASW's Center for Social Policy and Practice in 1986, the profession began to position itself to coordinate and exchange information and influence policy formulation on a national level. The policy center no longer exists in its original form (A. Ingram, personal communication, May 2, 2000). Locally, NASW, Minnesota chapter, could investigate and address techniques of information gathering and dissemination for the development of program policy, coalition building, member mobilization and retention strategies. This investigation may be conducted either through qualitative or quantitative research designs.

The findings of this study can further provide a basis to develop a quantitative survey to distribute to a larger sample of social work students, educators and practitioners. Comparisons could then be done to determine similarities and differences in the perceptions and experiences of individuals in social work from varying backgrounds. In a quantitative study on a larger scale, generalizations could be made to support the need for policy action related to political involvement and social justice issues concerning the disadvantaged, oppressed and underprivileged populations. Furthermore, future

research may be conducted utilizing focus group and hermeneutic qualitative type of designs to more fully understand and then abate the barriers to greater political participation by social work practitioners.

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Appendices

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research Questions

1) Why are social work practitioners involved or noninvolved in political activity?

2) Is this involvement or non-involvement in political activity by social work practitioners different between the public and private arena?

Interview Questions

1) How do you define political activity?

2) Based on this definition which of these activities are you involved in now or in the past (submit cue card with operational definition of political activity)?

3) What do you think has enabled you to participate in these political activities?

4) What do you think has prevented you from participating in these political activities?

5) What could NASW do to help you to participate in political activity?

6) What social policy issues are most critical to your practice?

7) What social policy issues are most critical to clients' interests?

8) If you do participate in political activity, do you think it makes s a positive difference for you and your clients? Why or why not?

9) What would you like public officials to know about the profession and its clients?

10) Would you ever consider running for public office? Why or why not?

The last section of the interview is demographic information.

2) Demographics:

Gender _____Male _____Female

Ethnicity: _____African American _____American Indian _____Asian American

_____Hispanic American _____Caucasian American

Other:_____

Year of Birth:_____

Relationship status: S M D Sep W SO

# of dependents_____

Year highest degree earned:_____

Social Work track:_____Micro _____Macro

Name of social work school:_____

Highest degree earned:

_____BSW

_____MSW

_____Ph.D./DSW

_____Other, specify_____

Years of social work practice:_____

Area of your practice (Please choose only one)

_____Aging/Gerontology social work

_____Alcohol, Drug or substance abuse

_____Community planning

_____Corrections/Criminal Justice

_____Family Service

_____Group Service

_____Health

_____Occupational/Industrial social work

_____Mental or Community Mental Health

_____Mental retardation

_____Public assistance/Public welfare

_____Rehabilitation

_____School social work

Other:_____

Please list your position (e.g., social worker, therapist, supervisors, case manager, etc.)_____

Type of current social work license:_____

Employment status: FT PT Not Emp.

You are working for:

_____The city government

_____The county government

_____The state government

_____The federal government

_____Private sector for profit

_____Private sector for non-profit

Other: Specify_____

Member of an organization: Y N. If Y, specify_____

Hobbies/Interest_____

Consent Form

You are invited to be in a research study regarding the involvement or noninvolvement of social work practitioners in political activity. The researcher is Tom Skarohlid, a student in the Master of Social Work program at Augsburg College. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a social work practitioners with at least eight to ten years of post-degree experience, employed by either the public or private sector and are a NASW member that lives in the Twin City area. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

I am conducting this study as part of my master's thesis at Augsburg College.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to develop a broader understanding of the factors that inhibit or encourage political participation of social work practitioners. This study is intended as an exploratory inquiry related to the personal thoughts, feelings and perceptions of social work practitioners and the factors that influence involvement or non-involvement in political activity.

Procedure

If you decide to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1.) Sign and date two copies of this form, one for you to keep and one for me to keep with the data for the study.
2.) Participate in a face to face interview with me which will take approximately 45 minutes to one-hour and will include questions of a personal nature.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the study

The risk involved in participating in this study is that many of the questions are personal and you may feel some emotional discomfort in discussing them. If at any time during our interview you wish to not answer a question or end your participation in the study, you may do so.

In the event that this research causes you any emotional discomfort or distress you may contact the Research Subjects' Advocate line in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

There will be a ten-dollar honorarium provided to participants. The honorarium will be provided regardless if the participant withdraws from the study.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In my thesis or any other report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Only

I and my thesis advisor will have access to the raw data. The data will be collected during one-to-one semi-structured, in-person interviews. Each participant will be interviewed once, at a location of his or her choice, and each interview will last from 45 minutes to one hour. Participants will be offered a ten-dollar honorarium for participating in the study. The primary researcher will conduct all interviews. With permission of the participants, all of the interviews will be audiotaped. All of the audiotapes will be transcribed to allow for repeated review of the data. The tape recordings of interviews will not contain any identifying information (such as a name, address or phone number). The tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet at my homeuntil my thesis has final approval, at which time the notes and tapes will be destroyed. All raw data will be destroyed by September 1, 2000.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation will be completely voluntary and confidential, and your decision to participate or not participate will have no effect on your current or future relationship with NASW, its staff or Augsburg College. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting the study is Tom Skarohlid. The thesis advisor on this project is Dr. Maria Dinis. If you have any questions regarding this research, before you sign this consent form, please discuss those with me (Tom Skarohlid) now at (W) 651-266-4078 or feel free to contact my advisor Dr. Maria Dinis (W) 612-330-1704 prior to us conducting the interview. If you would like to talk to someone other than the researcher or advisor, contact Research Subjects' Advocates line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. SE, Mpls., MN 55455; telephone (612) 625-1650.You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked questions as needed and have received answers. I consent to participate in this study.

Name (please print)_____

Signature_____Date_____

Signature of Investigator_____Date_____

I also consent to have my interview audiotaped and for the primary researcher to use quotes made by the participant during the interview.

Signature_____Date_____

Augsburg College IRB #99-70-3

Cue Card

1) Political activity of social work practitioners: political activity is defined as the coordinated efforts of social work practitioners to influence legislation, election of candidates and social causes. These activities also include lobbying, testifying before legislative committees, monitoring the work of officeholders and government workers, advocacy activities, running for elective office, organizing or participating in political campaigns, fundraising and mobilizing voters and public opinion (Barker, 1999).

Date

Dear Prospective Participant:

I am a graduate student working toward a Master of Social Work degree at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, MN. For my thesis project I am researching the factors that inhibit or encourage political participation of social work practitioners. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a social work practitioners with at least eight to ten years of post-degree experience, employed by either the public or private sector and are a NASW member that lives in the Twin City area. The NASW MN chapter is mailing this packet to you so I do not know your identity.

Your decision about participating in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate you will be asked to meet with me at a location within a one-hour drive of the Twin Cities for a face-to-face interview. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. With your permission the interview will be tape-recorded. The interview will include questions related to the personal thoughts, feelings and perceptions of social work practitioners and the factors that influence involvement or non-involvement in political activity. All the information from the interview will be kept confidential. When all the interviews are complete, information will be summarized to provide social workers and NASW MN chapter with important information regarding why social work practitioners are involved or noninvolved in political activity. None of the summarized information will include any identifying information about participants.

Participation will be completely voluntary and confidential, and your decision to participate or not participate will have no effect on your current or future relationship with NASW, its staff or Augsburg College. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Please read the enclosed Study Information Sheet carefully. Feel free to call the numbers on the sheet if you have any questions regarding this research project. If you are interested in learning more about or possibly participating in the study, please complete the enclosed Reply Form with your name and phone number and return it to me at NASW, MN chapter within the next week. Upon receiving your reply I will contact you by telephone to further discuss the study and if you are interested, to schedule a time to meet for an interview at your convenience.

Thank you in advance for considering participation in this research study.

Cordially yours,

Tom Skarohlid
Graduate Student and Principal Researcher
Augsburg College IRB #99-70-3

Study Information Sheet

You are invited to be in a research study regarding the involvement or noninvolvement of social work practitioners in political activity. The researcher is Tom Skarohlid, a student in the Master of Social Work program at Augsburg College. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a social work practitioners with at least eight to ten years of post-degree experience, employed by either the public or private sector and are a NASW member that lives in the Twin City area. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

I am conducting this study as part of my master's thesis at Augsburg College.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to develop a broader understanding of the factors that inhibit or encourage political participation of social work practitioners. This study is intended as an exploratory inquiry related to the personal thoughts, feelings and perceptions of social work practitioners and the factors that influence involvement or non-involvement in political activity.

Procedure

If you are able to meet for an interview in the Twin City area and you are interested in possibly being in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1) Please complete the enclosed Reply Form and return it to me at NASW MN chapter (in the enclosed envelope) by date.

2) I would then contact you by telephone to discuss any questions you may have and if you are interested, to arrange a face to face interview which will take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. We can arrange the meeting at a time and location (within the Twin City area) which is convenient and comfortable for you.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the study

The risk involved in participating in this study is that many of the questions are personal and you may feel some emotional discomfort in discussing them. If at any time during our interview you wish to not answer a question or end your participation in the study, you may do so.

In the event that this research causes you any emotional discomfort or distress you may contact the Research Subjects' Advocate line in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

There will be a ten-dollar honorarium provided to participants. The honorarium will be provided regardless if the participant withdraws from the study. The indirect benefits of this study could provide helpful insight for the field of social work and NASW, MN

chapter regarding the personal thoughts, feelings and perceptions of social work practitioners and the factors that influence involvement or non-involvement in political activity.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In my thesis or any other report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Only I will have access to the raw data. The data will be collected during one-to-one semi-structured, in-person interviews. Each participant will be interviewed once, at a location of his or her choice, and each interview will last from 45 minutes to one hour. Participants will be offered a ten-dollar honorarium for participating in the study. The primary researcher will conduct all interviews. With permission of the participants, all of the interviews will be audiotaped. All of the audiotapes will be transcribed to allow for repeated review of the data. The tape recordings of interviews will not contain any identifying information (such as a name, address or phone number). The tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet at my homeuntil my thesis has final approval, at which time the notes and tapes will be destroyed. All raw data will be destroyed by September 1, 2000.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation will be completely voluntary and confidential, and your decision to participate or not participate will have no effect on your current or future relationship with NASW, its staff or Augsburg College. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting the study is Tom Skarohlid. The thesis advisor on this project is Dr. Maria Dinis. If you have any questions regarding this research, before you sign this consent form, please discuss those with me (Tom Skarohlid) now or feel free to contact my advisor Dr. Maria Dinis (W) 612-330-1704 prior to us conducting the interview. If you would like to talk to someone other than the researcher or advisor, contact Research Subjects' Advocates line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. SE, Mpls., MN 55455; telephone (612) 625-1650.

Next Steps

If you are interested in possibly participating in or learning more about this study, please complete the enclosed Reply Form with your name and day and evening phone numbers and return it to me at NASW, MN chapter within the next week. I will then contact you by phone to discuss the study, answer any questions you may have, and if your interested, schedule an interview.

Augsburg College IRB #99-70-3

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MEMO

January 26, 2000

To: Mr. Thomas Skarohlid

From: Dr. Sharon Patten, IRB Chair SKP

RE: Your IRB Application

Thank you for your response to IRB issues and questions. Your study, "Political Involvement and Noninvolvement of Social Work Practitioners," is approved; your IRB approval number is 99-70-3. Please use this number on all official correspondence and written materials relative to your study.

Your research should prove valuable and provide important insight into an issue in social work practice, planning, and policy. We wish you every success!

SKP:ka

cc: Dr. Maria Dinis, Thesis Advisor

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

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